



Pick Your Path! Pilot Final Report (Summer 2020)

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Branches Team had to re-structure the Indigenous Mentorship and Paid Research Experience for Summer Students (IMPRESS) Program, which was set to be a pilot during Summer 2020. We developed a new program to be facilitated using only online resources, therefore making necessary changes to the program's structure to adapt to this new reality.

In order to avoid confusion, we renamed this online version of IMPRESS to be Pick Your Path! (PYP) – and it will be considered a part of Branches mentorship programming. Even though the structure of the programs differs, Pick Your Path! has the same mission of IMPRESS, which is to pique the interest of Indigenous students in education by offering an opportunity that gives exposure to various areas of study.

Pick Your Path! is an online learning experience for Indigenous summer students between the ages of 16-25. The program had two main goals: to provide students with the opportunity to have a paid professional development and education experience from a distance; and for every PYP participant, at the end of this 4-week period, to feel comfortable and empowered to make decisions about their post-secondary path – when the time should come!

PYP participants attended 10 online workshops led by 12 Indigenous and non-Indigenous McGill professors and graduate students. These workshops were meant to equip students with the tools needed to make informed and empowered decisions about their education – and to pick their path! Throughout the program, participants worked in their final project, which sought to answer the question "What are my next steps in my path of education?". To support them with their final project, PYP participants were paired with a mentor, an Indigenous McGill post-secondary student; the mentor-mentee relationship involved not only working on the final project, but also sharing experiences regarding post-secondary education and studying at McGill.

Participants and Mentors:

We received 13 applications from high school, CEGEP and University students to participate in the program, with 5 spots available. Likewise, we received a total of 9 applications of McGill students and alumni for the mentoring positions. Having such a positive response to the program is promising, as this is only the pilot. After the application process, which included an interview, we selected 5 participants and mentors to be part of PYP; however, only 4 were able to participate due to their availability to take part in the program.

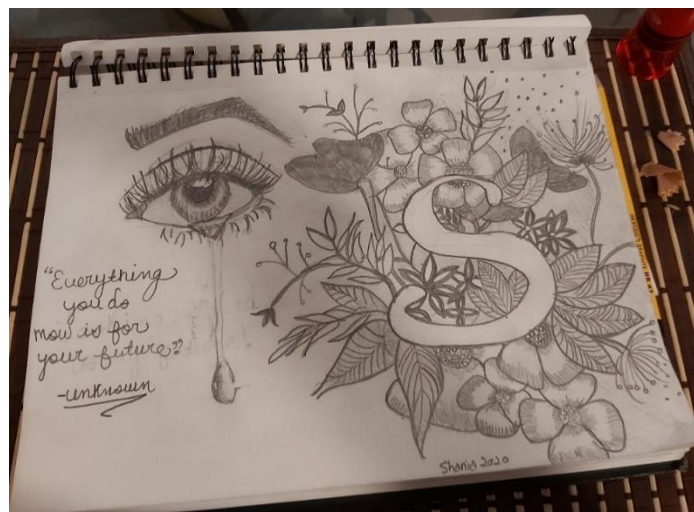


Final Projects:

PYP participants were required to complete a final project which would answer the guiding question "What are my next steps in my path of education?". Participants could use any medium they wanted to complete this project - i.e. a PowerPoint, an art piece, essay, video, etc. Throughout the 4-week program, they had the support of both their mentor and PYP Coordinator and project assistant to complete their project.

Please find below some examples of submitted final projects:

Shania Riche



"I have drawn an eye with a tear going down and an "S" with a floral background. The S is what stands for my name and the flowers represent the self-growth I have endured over the last year and a half and the growth I have experienced the month of the PYP program. The eye with the tear represents how much blood, sweat and tears people shed when it comes to working on themselves for a better future. I see good things and a lot more growth for myself not only for my academia. but for everything else life has to offer me"

Destiny Gregoire

Destiny is starting her first year in the Social Work program at McGill. She decided to make a both funny and serious video to explain her path so far, and her future educational path. Please find her video in this [link](#).



Richard Johnson

Richard is interested in medicine, so for his project he did research on various medical schools' (McGill, U of T, and UBC) requirements. Additionally, he mapped out his process and interests for his academic path! Richard chose to use a power point – please find it following this [link](#).

Conclusion:

Overall, we are very happy with how the first cycle of PYP went. The group of students were amazing - they asked insightful, thoughtful questions, and engaged in meaningful discussion with the speakers. When asked to provide feedback, the participants mentioned their interest was piqued by areas of study they had not considered before, as well as feeling more confident about their educational path, therefore meeting our goal. One of the participants is planning on applying to Law school, as she is interested in international law. Regarding the mentors, they shared that they not only enjoyed the mentoring experience, but they also learned from the participants reflections and experiences. We are confident that what we experienced through this pilot will inform and allow us to further improve the program.

Regarding the future of PYP, as we had interest from high school, CEGEP and University students alike, we are planning on creating different PYP streams for it to be tailored to the needs of each educational level. We are currently developing the second cycle of PYP to be facilitated during the first half of 2021, for Indigenous high school students. It will involve both online and in-person activities, if allowed. Furthermore, we are working to gain institutional support and sustainable funding for the program.